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ABSTRACT

The Lycoming County (Pennsylvania) Literacy Project hosts a tutor training workshop approximately four times per year to certify tutors to teach its learners. Previously, the information provided for the tutors at this workshop consisted of nearly 100 handouts distributed at random. Comments and observations indicated that having such a large amount of information distributed in a disorderly fashion created a problem for both the instructors and the learners at the training workshops. The handouts were revised and compiled with other useful information into a tutor training manual. Results of a survey given to both the instructors and learners indicated the development and implementation of the tutor training manual provided more useful, usable, and comprehensive training for everyone, as compared to simply dispersing handouts. (A questionnaire on the handbook is appended.) (YLB)

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A Learning From Practice Project

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Contact State Literacy Resource Center for Additional copies.

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PRODUCT

"Pennsylvania Action Research Network:
Staff Development Through
Six Professional Development Centers"

Project Number 099-99-9010
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Project Director
Dr. Gary Kuhne
Assistant Professor and Regional Director of Adult Education
The Pennsylvania State University

Note: Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry credited to Kurt Lewin who popularized it in the U.S. in the 1940"s. Today it is considered a system of qualitative research. Typical of action research, none of the individual projects in this monograph series claims to have generalizable application beyond the specific project described. However, each monograph report can serve to be illustrative, instructive and provides the potential for replication in other locations. For a level of generalizability, it is recommended that the reader seek common patterns in the monograph reports in this series, and the wider literature, or contact the Action Research Network for assistance in this.

I. ABSTRACT

The Lycoming County Literacy Project hosts a tutor training workshop approximately four times per year in order to certify tutors to teach our learners. Previously, the information provided for the tutors at this workshop consisted of nearly 100 handouts distributed at random. Based on comments, observations, and my own frustrations, I determined that having such a large amount of information distributed in a disorderly fashion created a problem for both the instructors and the learners of the training workshops. As a result, I revised the handouts and compiled them with some other useful information into a tutor training manual. Based on the results of a survey given to both the instructors and learners, the development and implementation of the tutor training manual provided more useful, usable, comprehensive training for everyone, as compared to just simply dispersing handouts.

II. PROBLEM

Approximately four times per year, the literacy project hosts a tutor training session in order to recruit new tutors to teach our students to read. The training consists of several informal lectures and activities designed to enable the tutors to teach a person how to read. The problem facing the Lycoming County Literacy Project is that the training material that is dispersed at the tutor training sessions is not organized, compiled, or distributed in an orderly fashion. Unfortunately, a large amount of important information is handed out to the new tutors in a short period of time. This only adds to the frustration of absorbing all the information given.

One of the reasons the training material has not been better organized is because of a lack of time. The staff at the literacy project is very busy. As is in most offices, we all have very limited time to work on projects that do not require immediate attention. As a result, there has not been enough time to organize tutor training material into a more easily understood manual.

Having completed the tutor training session, as well as working in the literacy office, I can see first hand the need for a tutor training manual. When I was certified as a tutor, it was extremely difficult for me to sort through all the training material (nearly 100 pages). It was nearly impossible to find a specific piece of the information that was given without becoming frustrated while sorting through the entire stack of papers. I also read through several evaluations from past tutor training's and nearly 30 percent of the population surveyed commented on the lack of

organization of the material.

I discovered that it is equally difficult for my supervisors to keep track of 100 handouts let alone distribute them in an orderly fashion. I surveyed my supervisors, who also instruct the tutor training's, and they agreed that there was a need for a training manual.

III. PLANNING

I planned to eliminate this problem by organizing a tutor training manual that would be well organized as well as user friendly. The training manual I developed has a table of contents with corresponding chapters and page numbers. The only materials I needed to complete the project were paper, a computer, and a binding machine. In order to create the manual I needed to first put the information in logical order. I also needed to retype several pages to make the manual consistent. With the approval of my supervisor, I made chapter pages and a table of contents. Finally, I created a completed version of the training manual.

To create a baseline, I gave a copy of the manual as well as a survey about the manual, to tutors who were given the large amount of loose handouts at the tutor training sessions. The focus group was chosen from tutors who have been active based on attendance to meetings and tutor hours submitted. I also reviewed the evaluations made by tutors who completed the most recent tutor training sessions (before the manual was implemented).

I interviewed my supervisors as another means of collecting data. I asked them if the manual made it easier for them to teach the tutors. I found that a manual served as a better guideline for training. This allowed me to keep this project up to date with my supervisors as well. I submitted my work to them periodically for suggestions, corrections, and improvements.
I thought I would be constrained by not getting the responses to the evaluations that I was looking for. I also wondered if it would be difficult to keep the focus of this problem narrow. However, after talking to people about the manual the response was exactly what I was looking for. In fact, a copy of the manual was shown at one of our board meetings. As a result, I received a thank-you card from the founder of the Lycoming County Literacy Project.

The question my project posed was "Will the development and implementation of a tutor training manual provide more useful, usable, comprehensive training for both tutors and students and in the long run aid the recruitment process?" My results proved that the answer was yes.

IV. ACTION

In order to plan for this project, I had to first make a manual. This part of the project took much longer than I had anticipated. The first step to creating a manual was to organize all the material we received into logical order. Based on the information given, I divided the information into five sections which later became chapters. After organizing the material into sections, I then had to organize the sections into pages. In the mean time I had my supervisors review each step of the process. Unfortunately, I revised the manual several times before it was complete. I retyped numerous pages to make the manual consistent and added page numbers for easier usage. Finally, I added a content page and introductory chapter describing the literacy project and the manual was complete. This part of the project took approximately four months.

After the manual was complete, I made 20 copies for one of my supervisors to take to a prison training. Before the training manual was implemented nearly 30 percent of the attendants of our tutor training's commented on the lack of organization of written materials. In the first training after the manual was implemented there were no negative comments made about the materials used. In fact there were two comments made about the manual being the most helpful information received.

As another means of collecting data. I mailed a copy of the manual to over 20 of our most active tutors based on attendance to literacy activities and submission of tutor/student hours. I tried to include a variety of tutors including young and old, male and female, and also some who are on the Board of Directors. Attached to the manual was a letter explaining the nature of this PA-ARN project, as well as a survey asking questions about the manual. I asked them if they had any difficulties sorting through the material that was distributed at the training session they attended. I also asked them if they preferred the manual or the handouts. There were also six other pertinent questions. The only problem I had with this collecting this data was not getting all the responses from everyone I mailed a survey to. However, I received enough to accurately determine if the project was a success.

The last bit of data I collected involved interviewing the tutor training instructors who are also the supervisors of the office I work in. I asked them many questions about how the manual made it easier for them to conduct the trainings. They were all for the manual and gave me several

suggestions to improve it along the way.

V. RESULTS

I received excellent results from the survey. Fifty percent of the sample group said that they had difficulties sorting through the material that was given at the tutor training session that they attended. The entire sample preferred the manual over the handouts. When asked to rate the handbook on a scale on one to ten, the average rating the group gave was an 8.5. Several participants also gave encouraging comments about how helpful the manual was. The main comment was that it was easier to go back and find a specific bit of information without having any difficulties.

My supervisors were also impressed with the manual. They said that it made it much easier for them to refer to page numbers during training to avoid confusion. It also made it easier for them to efficiently distribute the material without having to pass out 100 sheets of paper to each participant. Overall, it was much less time consuming for obvious reasons. The manual is easier to assemble and prepare as well as hand out.

Fortunately, as people found out about the manual by word of mouth, they were very encouraging. One of my co-workers used the manual at a tutor training support group that she was establishing. I also received praise from some of the literacy board members. In fact, the founder of the Lycoming County Literacy Project mailed me a letter to personally thank me herself.

VI. REFLECTION

I feel that overall the project went very well. Although it was very frustrating and time consuming revising the manual over and over, it was well worth it to see the finished product. I feel that it will help the literacy project significantly because the manual can be given to anyone who wants to know more about teaching someone to read. The manual can also be given to anyone who wants to know more about our organization.

It was nice to see that this project affected and will continue to affect numerous other people besides myself. That made the difference. Now that the project has been finished for a short time, its nice to see the completed work in hind sight. I have continued to get positive feedback since I distributed the manuals to the focus group. Evidently, some of them must be showing the manual

to others. I am sure as time goes on, I will see further results. My supervisors have not yet gotten the chance to get used to using the manual. I am sure I will probably also need to make more corrections as more people review it. However, despite all the work involved, if I did the project again, I don't think I would really change much. I am happy with the results.

Lycoming County

LITERACY
PROJECT
INC

March 26, 1999

Dear Tutors,

Currently, I am in the process of planning a PA-ARN (Pennsylvania Action Research Network) project. For my project I have chosen to make a tutor training handbood in place of the handouts that all or most of you received when you were first trained as a tutor. Hopefully, the development and implementation of a tutor training manual will provide more useful, usable, comprehensive training for tutors, as compared to just simply distributing handouts.

I chose to send a copy of the handbook to the most active tutors, based on attendance to literacy activities and submission of tutor/student hours. I feel that your opinion is especially valuable to this project. It would help me tremendously if you could look at the handbook and respond by mailing back the enclosed survey.

Thank you so much for your time and attention. I hope that the tutor training manual is very beneficial. All the information found in the handbook is comprised of previous handouts given at tutor trainings as well as some new information that should also make tutoring successful. Call the office at 321-0200 if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Stacey Roles

Stacey Roles

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c/o James V. Brown Library
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Williamsport, Pennsylvania 17701

Handbook Questionnaire

1. After reviewing the handbook, do you feel that it would be better or worse to implement it in place of the handouts previously distributed at tutor training workshops?
Circle: **Better** or **Worse**

2. On a scale of one(bad) to ten(good), how would you rate the handbook?
Circle: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10**

3. Hypothetically speaking, if you were to attend another tutor training workshop, would you prefer to use the manual or handouts?
Circle: **Manual** or **Handouts**

4. Did you have any difficulties sorting through the material that was given at the tutor training workshop that you attended?
Circle: **Yes** or **No**

5. Is the handbook more helpful to you than the handouts?
Circle: **Yes** or **No**

6. Please explain why you would favor either the tutor training manual or the handout that were given when you attended the training workshop.
_____
_____
_____

7. In contrast, explain why you oppose either the training manual or the handouts. _____
_____
_____

8. List any suggestions you have that could help improve the tutor training manual. _____
_____
_____